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Lantanophaga pusillidactylus (Walker, 1864) new to the Maltese Islands (Lepidoptera: Pterophoridae)

J. Agius

Abstract

Lantanophaga pusillidactylus (Walker, 1864) is reported for the first time from the Maltese Islands. The genus *Lantanophaga* Zimmerman, 1958 is also recorded here for the first time from the Maltese Islands. Distribution, habits of the adult and larval host plant are included. A Maltese name is proposed for this new record.

KEY WORDS: Lepidoptera, Pterophoridae, *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus*, Malta.

Lantanophaga pusillidactylus (Walker, 1864) nueva para Malta
(Lepidoptera: Pterophoridae)

Resumen

Lantanophaga pusillidactylus (Walker, 1864) se cita por primera vez para Malta. El género *Lantanophaga* Zimmerman, 1958 se cita también por primera vez para Malta. Se incluyen datos sobre su distribución, hábitat del adulto y la planta nutricia de la larva. Se propone un nombre maltés para esta nueva cita.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Lepidoptera, Pterophoridae, *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus*, Malta.

Introduction

In the family Pterophoridae, over a thousand species have been described worldwide with over half of these occurring within the Palaearctic region (HEPPNER, 1991). In Europe this family is represented by two subfamilies, Agdistinae with one genus and 23 species, and Pterophorinae with 31 genera and 115 species. Two other subfamilies, Ochyroticinae and Deuterocopinae occur within the tropics and have no European representatives (GIELIS, 1996).

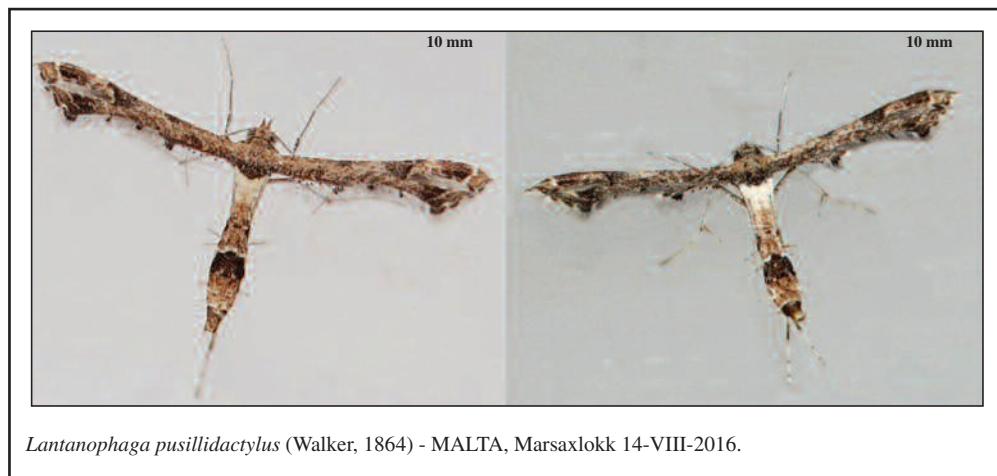
In the Maltese Islands, a total of 24 Pterophoridae have been recorded, seven in the Agdistinae and 17 in the Pterophorinae (SAMMUT, 2000) with *Capperia hellenica* being the latest addition to the Pterophoridae species of the Maltese Islands (SAMMUT, 2004). In the Agdistinae, two species, namely *Agdistis melitensis* Amsel, 1954 and *Agdistis symmetrica* Amsel, 1955 have been originally described as endemic to the Maltese Islands (AMSEL, 1954, 1955). *Agdistis melitensis* has been found also on Corsica while *Agdistis symmetrica* is known also from Tunisia (GIELIS, 1996).

The genus *Lantanophaga* Zimmerman, 1958 was originally found in the tropical and subtropical regions and contains 4 species, with only *L. pusillidactylus* found in Europe so far (GIELIS, 1996).

Material

MALTA: 1 exp., Marsaxlokk, 14-VIII-2016, leg. J. Agius; 1 exp., Marsaxlokk 21-VIII-2016, leg.

J. Agius; 1 exp., Marsaxlokk, 26-VIII-2016, leg. J. Agius. All three specimens were found during the day resting on a wall in very close proximity to *Lantana camara*.



Lantanophaga pusillidactylus (Walker, 1864) - MALTA, Marsaxlokk 14-VIII-2016.

The species is naturally found throughout Mexico and the Caribbean. In Europe and the Mediterranean area, until 1996 *L. pusillidactylus* was only known from Morocco, Madeira and the Canary Islands however, through some Spanish records, in 1997 it was recorded for the first time from mainland Europe (KING, 2000). A few years later, the species was recorded from mainland Italy (BELLA & MARCHESE, 2007), from Sicily (D'URSO *et al.*, 2008) and from Portugal (CORLEY *et al.*, 2008). Most probably *L. pusillidactylus* was introduced in various countries with the importation of *Lantana* plants. The larvae are known to feed on various *Lantana* species, but its main food plant is *Lantana camara*. They feed inside flowers or tunnel around the base of the flower for seven to ten days and pupate in the flower clusters. The development time from egg to adult is about fourteen days. In fact, all three records of *Lantanophaga pusillidactylus* were found in close proximity to *Lantana camara*. According to GIELIS (1996) the adults are on the wing in July and again between September and December. The Maltese records consolidate the flight period to the last 6 months of the year, so possibly *L. pusillidactylus* has multiple broods during the year.

Considering that three specimens were found over a 12 day, period and within a few metres from the food plant, it can easily be assumed that the *L. pusillidactylus* is breeding in the Maltese Islands. *Lantana camara* is a common ornamental plant in Malta so it should not be difficult for *L. pusillidactylus* to spread all over Malta.

Both genus and species are new to the Maltese lepidopterofauna. I propose the Maltese name 'Pjuma Zghira tal-Lantana' after a transliteration of the scientific name.

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